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Preparatory process of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

The present note is prepared in response to paragraph 3 of resolution 71/318, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a background note, including proposals for the overarching theme of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, to be held in Buenos Aires from 20 to 22 March 2019, taking into account the important role of South-South and triangular cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and sub-themes for the interactive panel discussions, for the consideration of Member States.

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I. Introduction

1. The present note is prepared in response to paragraph 3 of resolution 71/318, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a background note, including proposals for the overarching theme of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, to be held in Buenos Aires from 20 to 22 March 2019, taking into account the important role of South-South and triangular cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and sub-themes for the interactive panel discussions, for the consideration of Member States.

2. The High-level Conference, which will mark the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, will be aimed at reviewing the trends in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, including the progress made by the international community, in particular the United Nations, in supporting and promoting such cooperation and identifying new opportunities, as well as challenges and suggestions to overcome them.

3. The present note serves to highlight the fact that South-South cooperation has become an important element of the global cooperation architecture for sustainable development. It underscores the potential of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation to further contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The note also contains a proposal for an overarching theme and four sub-themes for the Conference.

4. The landscape of international development cooperation is evolving in the light of the growth of South-South cooperation for sustainable development, driven by the essential role of such cooperation in bolstering the productive capacities of developing countries and its positive impacts on trade and financial flows, technological capabilities and economic growth (see General Assembly resolution 71/244). In that context, the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation will build on the Buenos Aires Plan of Action and the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to enable the international community to consolidate its approach to the role of South-South cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed development goals. The Conference will therefore provide the opportunity to review lessons learned over the past four decades, with a view to implementing an inclusive strategy that effectively leverages South-South and triangular approaches to achieving sustainable development for all, leaving no one behind.

5. The implementation in countries of the South of a set of successful public policies on economic, social, scientific and technological matters, and the determination to promote partnerships and reduce asymmetries by facilitating mutual learning and the exchange of knowledge and experience, have highlighted the relevant contribution that South-South cooperation can make to addressing persistent development challenges. In that context, mention may be made of the many instruments and institutions that have been put in place by these countries to harness the potential of South-South cooperation for sustainable development (South-South interregional processes of cooperation, regional and thematic sustainable development policy dialogues, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, the Belt and Road Initiative and trust funds dedicated to South-South cooperation, among others).

6. Despite the notable progress achieved by some countries of the South, they still face significant economic, social and environmental challenges. The exchange of

knowledge, experiences and development solutions is critical for the countries of the South to achieve the 2030 Agenda, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, and other internationally agreed development goals and frameworks. However, a gap still exists in the mapping, documentation and sharing of experiences and best practices in South-South and triangular cooperation. There is a need to mobilize and use in a systematic way the broad South-South knowledge on sustainable development for the benefit of all.

7. The Conference is aimed at reviewing trends in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, addressing challenges and opportunities, and discussing the contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

II. South-South cooperation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

8. The 2030 Agenda is the major global sustainable development framework that guides international efforts towards the achievement of sustainable development in a coherent and inclusive manner. Given its scope and ambition, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the mobilization of all types of partnerships that should be engaged coherently towards common objectives. Countries are encouraged to step up their efforts to strengthen South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in the context of an enhanced and revitalized global partnership for sustainable development.

9. Profound changes have taken place in the international cooperation context in recent decades, and South-South cooperation has been recognized as an important element of international cooperation for sustainable development involving all stakeholders. There is, however, a gap in effectively following up on South-South cooperation and its impact on achieving sustainable development objectives.

10. Countries of the South are important players in the global economy. In recent years, they have generated about half of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and have contributed the most to recent global economic growth.

11. Through solidarity, countries of the South are contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in other developing countries through the provision of resources and by sharing their own experiences and approaches to development.

12. South-South cooperation must be understood as an important framework that complements traditional North-South cooperation, not as a substitute for North-South cooperation. Despite the remarkable gains and benefits of South-South cooperation, a renewed global partnership and a strengthened United Nations development system must play a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

13. In the 2030 Agenda, through Goal 17 (Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development), Member States called for an inclusive and revitalized partnership for sustainable development based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries and all stakeholders. As underscored by the Nairobi outcome document, South-South cooperation embraces a multi-stakeholder approach that brings together Governments, the United Nations system, the private sector, civil society, academia and other actors, mobilizing all available resources in line with national development strategies and plans.

14. There is a growing demand to support South-South cooperation at the regional, subregional and interregional levels. These types of collaboration constitute an important aspect of partnership among the countries of the South. In the Nairobi outcome document, Member States called for the strengthening of interregional dialogue and the exchange of experience among subregional and regional economic groupings for the purpose of expanding South-South cooperation.

15. The United Nations system continues to enhance its support for South-South and triangular collaboration by mainstreaming South-South cooperation into the policy frameworks and operations that are aimed at assisting in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are also increasingly allocating dedicated funds and human resources to boost their South-South cooperation initiatives at the headquarters, country and regional levels. However, there is a need to better coordinate and mainstream United Nations support for South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

III. Proposed overarching theme and sub-themes

16. The proposed overarching theme of the Conference and the four proposed sub-themes for the interactive panel discussions are set out below.

A. Overarching theme
Role of South-South cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: challenges and opportunities

17. South-South cooperation is already playing a key role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and significant efforts are being made by Member States, the United Nations and other stakeholders to enhance the contribution of South-South cooperation to sustainable development.

18. The objective of the Conference is to identify challenges and opportunities and to address ways of strengthening the institutional framework for South-South cooperation in order to effectively scale up such cooperation and to harness its potential and impact in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

19. Approaches and policies have been put in place by Member States at the national and regional levels, as well as by the United Nations system and other stakeholders, to bolster the role of South-South cooperation in building inclusive sustainable development.

B. Sub-theme 1
Comparative advantages and opportunities of South-South cooperation

20. South-South cooperation has proved effective in many areas, such as capacity-building, policy coordination, regional integration, interregional linkages, infrastructure interconnectivity and the development of national productive capacities through exchanges of knowledge and technological innovation.

21. The Conference will provide an opportunity to identify new areas in which South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation can add value and have more impact.

C. Sub-theme 2
Challenges and the strengthening of the institutional framework of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

22. At the Conference, participants will emphasize the nature and principles of South-South cooperation.

23. They will also consider the nature and principles of triangular cooperation.

24. In the past decades, a number of countries have established and developed governmental agencies or departments for South-South cooperation that continue to evolve; others are just beginning to set up such institutional arrangements. The Conference will provide an opportunity to explore ways to create enabling environments for the further institutionalization of South-South cooperation.

25. Given the evolving global context and the potential of South-South cooperation, the Conference will also serve to address the strengthening of the institutional framework for South-South cooperation.

26. Reporting on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation at the national and regional levels, on a voluntary basis and in accordance with national capacities, will be necessary in order to follow up on the implementation of South-South cooperation for sustainable development.

27. At the Conference, participants will examine approaches to enhancing the United Nations system-wide coordination mechanism on South-South cooperation.

D. Sub-theme 3
Sharing of experiences, best practices and success stories

28. At the Conference, participants will explore the best approaches to mapping and documenting good practices in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, as well as the dissemination and sharing of innovative development solutions from the countries of the South.

29. They will examine South-South cooperation as a critical instrument for deepening regional cooperation and integration towards achieving sustainable development. South-South interregional cooperation frameworks are also relevant forums for furthering sustainable development in many regions of the world.

E. Sub-theme 4
Scaling up the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in support of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

30. At the Conference, participants will enhance South-South and triangular partnerships with the involvement of all stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, academia, think tanks and the philanthropic sector.

31. They will underscore the role of triangular cooperation and how to leverage the contributions of wider actors and resources in overcoming common challenges.

32. They will also highlight the importance of enhancing regional and international South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in science, technology transfer and innovation, and of increasing the exchange of knowledge on mutually agreed terms.

33. Recognizing that South-South cooperation could encompass more than technical cooperation and capacity development, participants will emphasize trade, investment, infrastructure and technological exchanges among developing countries and the role, commitments and responsibilities of developed countries in the current development context.

IV. Conclusion

34. The second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation should provide momentum for concerted and cooperative action, through partnerships among all stakeholders, to bolster the role of South-South cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.